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Around the Jetties

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Issue 92

An Anglers Newsletter

“The majority of large mulloway taken by anglers from the Gippsland lakes have come from the vicinity of Shaving Point at Metung. However mulloway range throughout the system when prawns are running and are sometimes hooked by anglers fishing for other species.”

Geoff Wilson “Fishing the Gippsland Lakes” 1992



An Historical Item.

Mulloway in the Gippsland Lakes

Reader and keen fisherman Geoff Trusler supplied the following historical item.

Geoff Wilson, a well-known fishing writer of the time for the Fishing News magazine, wrote the article in 1993. Geoff Wilson was also the author of an excellent small book entitled

“Fishing the Gippsland Lakes (1992) and this book is regarded as one of the best angler guides to the Gippsland Lakes. Geoff Wilson has written a numerous books and articles on fishing and has been fishing writer on the Age newspaper. He is well known for his book on knots, which is almost a standard reference for anglers.



55lb Mulloway caught by Don George 14/5/87 at Shaving Point, Metung

This fish can be seen in George’s Café, Main Street, Bairnsdale

Now to Geoff Wilson’s views on mulloway in the Gippsland Lakes.

“Although healthy populations of mulloway have been recorded in the Gippsland Lakes by official Fisheries surveys, most of the experienced anglers I spoke with while researching this story did not rate mulloway as a catchable species.

However, Pat Milito, a licenced fisherman of more than thirty years, recalled many incidents with big mulloway in his nets, and tells of one incident during which he lost a few popularity points with Metung locals.

Approached by catering personnel for the heads of Government meeting in Canberra (they asked if he could obtain a quantity of jewfish.) Pat obligingly set out to fill the order by shooting a large shark net right of the private jetties on Shaving Point.

The result of that episode was a catch of 49 big jewies for a total weight close to a 1000kgs. Others had to be cut free from the net because of the boats precarious lack of freeboard.

In fact, Pat’s first encounter with a big jewie was at Metung, some thirty years before, while netting bait at the mouth of Chinamen’s Creek. It weighed 112lb and made the front page of the local newspaper.

Shaving Point at Metung always produces a few jewies each year, most of them inadvertent catches by anglers fishing for other species. However, Don George of the famous Georges hamburgers in Bairnsdale has successfully targeted mulloway here, and has a 25lb specimen mounted on the wall of his shop to prove it.”

Source - February/March “Fishing News” Written by Geoff Wilson 1993



Lance Wedlick in his book “The fighting Bream and other Estuary Fish,” suggests that many inlets like Mallacoota and lakes like Lake King in the Gippsland Lakes produce many mulloway up to 12lb. (School mulloway.) This book comes from the same era as Geoff Wilson’s book. It would seem the numbers of mulloway like other Gippsland Lakes species have declined, or are not reported. However, the chance may still exist for anglers to hook one of these fighting fish, and the evidence would seem to suggest they might be more than a school mulloway of 12lbs.

I have quoted previously the experience of Alec Milledge who some 20 years ago fishing from his jetty, for bream hooked and landed a mulloway of around 20lb on light bream gear. His jetty would be less than 100 metres from Shaving Point. That fish is mounted and hangs on the wall in his study.

I recall around ten years ago yarning to a chap who was cleaning a large eel under the Highway bridge on the Tambo. A few days later his photo appeared in the Bairnsdale Advertiser holding a 57lb mulloway he caught whilst surf fishing at Pettman’s Beach.

In recent times, some anglers fishing Lake Tyers have had large fish almost run their reels. Soon after Lake Tyers closed after the most recent opening, I recall John Harrison Secretary of Lake Tyers Beach Angling Club hooking a large fish and attempting to follow this fish with his boat, only to ultimately lose the fish. Could this have been a mulloway? There has been one confirmed catch of a 5lb mulloway in Lake Tyers in the last year; unfortunately, we do not have a photo of that catch.

Dr Mathew Taylor from the University of NSW in his study of “Victorian Waters selected for Fish Releases” (2010) writing of Lake Tyers, says, “Larger mulloway have been captured in the estuary, but there is no record of juveniles occurring here. This is not surprising, as mulloway traditionally recruit to riverine estuaries as juveniles, and rely on substantial areas of deeper structured habitat.”

Dr Taylor opposed mulloway releases in estuaries with lagoonal features rather than deep structured habitat and regarded Lake Tyers as lacking habitat for juvenile mulloway. Dr Taylor did recommend Eastern King Prawn and dusky flathead for release in Lake Tyers.

Any discussion on mulloway is difficult, due to the lack of definitive record, of catches in estuaries and this particularly applies to Lake Tyers, whilst the Gippsland Lakes have some historical details of mulloway catches still available mainly through oral history, and photos in the local newspapers.

I recently visited **Georges Café** in Main St Bairnsdale to admire a marvellous large mulloway mounted on the wall, and this fish is a feature of this café. (See photo front page. Photo page2 also in Georges Cafe)

This beautifully mulloway was caught off Shaving Point in the Gippsland Lakes at Metung by Don George. In addition, in the cafe there are dozens of photographs of local catches of a variety of species, all caught by recreational anglers in the Gippsland area. These photos include numbers of other mulloway including one fish that weighed in excess of 100lbs caught off a local beach. Amongst the photos are a number featuring mulloway caught in the Mallacoota Inlet.

It is well worth a visit to George's café, which incidentally was recognised as producing the ninth best hamburger in Australia, and George was interviewed on the ABC Gippsland morning program just prior to my visit. By the way, George did indicate that one of the best baits for mulloway was a tailor filet, and yes, the mulloway can be heard at night actually grunting and according to George, and this is part of the mating procedure of this fish.

[This background is provided to recreational anglers, as there has been some preliminary discussion on the possibility of stocking Lake Tyers with mulloway.](#)

Given the current black bream and dusky flathead stock in this wonderful small estuary, Fisheries and anglers would need to be very sure that any impact of stocking would not have an adverse effect on either the bream or dusky flathead populations of this water.

Mulloway Research in NSW

Over the last five years, 81 mulloway have been implanted with acoustic tags in the Clyde, Shoalhaven, and Georges Rivers in NSW. A research project found mulloway spent most of their time in brackish water in estuaries, and the smaller mulloway undertook larger migrations in response to decreases in salinity in estuaries. It was also found mulloway completely altered their behaviour in response to rainfall. An important finding was that mulloway were less active and likely to be found in deeper water on weekends. It was suggested this was a result of greater on water activity from boats and thus increased noise. Future analysis of the data will examine movements of the mulloway to the sea and migrations between estuaries.

[Details of NSW Research "Modern Fishing Magazine." December 2014 \(Research undertaken by NSW Coastal and Estuarine Fish Tracking Project.\)](#)



Geoff Trusler who provided the interesting excerpt on mulloway taken from the 1993 Fishing News has previously provided the Gippsland Tourism Reports on fishing for 1988/89 to Around the Jetties. Excerpts from these reports have proved invaluable, as they have provided evidence of the level of individual recreational catches in those years and this has highlighted the dramatic decline in catches in the Gippsland Lakes tributaries over the intervening years.

Thanks Geoff for your support of Around the Jetties.

This Photo of Steve Ward with a mulloway he landed in Esperance W.A. shows that Mulloway exist all the way around our coastline. What a beauty!

VRFish and Corio Bay

VRFish the recreational fishing peak body has been involved with Fisheries Victoria, in a survey of recreational fishers and comparing the catch of recreational anglers with the commercial catch in Corio Bay. The data shows the commercial catch of snapper in Corio Bay (15 tonnes) is three times that of the recreational sector (5.3 tonnes.) There is a similar trend for flathead in Corio Bay (14.1 to 4.9 tonnes). The commercial calamari catch is about twelve times the recreational catch. (4.1 tonnes to 324 kgs) while the catch of King George whiting is almost two and a half times that of recreational fishers. The Andrews government

has pledged \$20 million towards a buyback of commercial licences and is setting a sliding cap on catches that will reduce commercial access as licences are removed over the next eight years.

The recreational fishery in Victoria is valued at \$2.3 billion to the state economy and provides hundreds of jobs. The recreational fishing in Port Phillip Bay alone is worth \$230 million annually.

Source The above information was obtained from a VRFish Media Release dated 28th June 2015

Editor

Rural recreational anglers appreciate the importance of the removal of the commercial netters from Port Phillip and Corio Bays and congratulate the **Andrews Government** on this initiative however, East Gippsland recreational anglers **wonder why no similar action has been undertaken in the Gippsland Lakes**. Anglers are aware that a number of commercial fishermen on the Gippsland Lakes asked the previous Government member for East Gippsland to initiate a buyback of their licences, however no action was undertaken by the Coalition Government. This inaction was rather surprising and disappointed recreational anglers given that any action by the Government could have been cost neutral if recreational angler licence fees had been used to buy back commercial licences. Recreational anglers hope that the Andrews Government will consider this possibility and that over 8 years the licence fees of recreational anglers might be used to buy back the 10 commercial licences operating in the Gippsland Lakes.

Such an action together with restocking could have a major positive influence on the Target One Million project of the Andrews Government.

Source VRFish Media Release 5th July 2015

Building Trout Habitat Rock by Rock

The above was a heading in the Wangaratta Chronicle of an article by reporter Anita McPherson, describing a \$200,000 project to restore trout habitat in the King River in the North East of the state. Twenty-eight giant rocks including a ten tonne boulder were rolled into place in the river. This marked the start of a three-year program initiated by the King Valley Tourism Association in partnership with the North East Catchment Management Authority and funded by the Recreational Fishing Grants Program.



This project was initiated following a marked decline in trout population in this stream, which was part of the decline across the state including East Gippsland. King Valley Tourism Association member Graeme Bird said “there have been years of maltreatment of the river based on what was thought to be the best thing like removing snags, and bulldozing straight lines in the river so the water got away quicker. Now it’s gone back to a reinstatement program to get the fish back in the river.” Future project stages will include logjams and restocking.

Editor

Considerable river work and fish research is being carried out in rivers of the North East to come to grips with the statewide decline in trout, however, there is almost no publicity of any similar work being carried out in the trout streams of East Gippsland. I took the attached photos of the rocks in the King River, and must say unless further work is to be undertaken I see little evidence of greatly improved habitat or cover for trout. Perhaps with floods and debris caught up with these boulders habitat will be created. **Source**-Thanks to Rob Edgar for this cutting from the Wangaratta Chronicle. Rob’s home is on the bank of the King River at Moyhu.

The Twin Rivers Fishing Competition

The annual Twin Rivers bream Competition conducted on Rivers flowing into the Gippsland Lakes is about to occur. Perhaps at this time it is appropriate to look at fishing on the same weekend in 1988 and to consider the changes that have occurred in a short seventeen-year span. We are lucky to be able to look at the fishing in these local rivers in 1988 due to the published record of catches released on that week by Gippsland Tourism.

“Fishing Report _ Week ending 18th July 1988

Tambo River-*The fish are mainly being caught towards the mouth at Reynolds Road and Marshall’s Flat using sandworm for bait.*

Des and Theresa Hajdu of Boronia landed 40 bream for 13.5kgs over two days last week. Barry Forrest and his mate from Yallourn North hooked 24 bream and 12 mullet on Wednesday and 30 bream on Saturday.

David Girao and Leo Seiler of Dromana fished for three days for 90 bream weighing around 26kgs. The Beaumaris Angling Club fished the Tambo for three days with seven members and captained by Sandy Aitchison. They took home 127 bream. Noel Allen of Mill Park on Saturday hooked 27 bream. Pat and Paul Regulski of the Moe Angling Club over the weekend landed 154 bream for 54 kgs. All the above catches were taken at Marshall’s and Reynold’s Flat,

Tim Hajnal, Eric Brown, and Simon Hanndford of West Meadows Angling Club caught 142 bream at Sardine Flat. Stan Foot of Flemington and Jim Lacon of Frankston over 11/2 days hooked 35 bream for 13 kgs. Len Morgan of Bairnsdale fished over the weekend for 32 bream weighing in around 10kgs caught at Reynolds. Mrs McFee and her sonless of Phillip Island caught 45 bream at the mouth of the Tambo on Sunday using sandworm.

Neal Smart of Healesville hooked 34 bream also at the mouth of the river over the weekend on sandworm.

Gary and John Hassen with Max Bone and Finley Motherwell of Wonthaggi landed 57 bream at Marshall’s flat over the weekend on bass yabbies and sandworm. Phillip Smith from Rosanna landed 25 bream and 1 perch near the mouth on sandworm. On Thursday Garry and Theresa of Craigieburn took home 28 bream caught near the mouth of the river”

A similar report on fishing in the Mitchell and Nicholson Rivers as well as the Bemm River were included in this 1988 weeks Tourism Fishing Report.

Editor

This report with its detail provides an accurate picture of what the fishing in these rivers was like less than two decades ago. It also indicates the value of the recreational black bream fishery to the local community with anglers from all over Victoria coming to the East Gippsland Rivers to fish for black bream. The only comparison today is the recreational Blue fin tuna fishery based on Portland, which contributes \$9 million annually to the Portland community.

I think what must be a concern today with the benefit of hindsight is the lack of any bag limit imposed on recreational anglers by Fisheries to protect fish stocks in 1988 and ensure the black bream fishery was maintained. Finally, the Tourism Reports provided a great deal of information, which might be regarded as being valuable in determining the stock status of black bream. These reports also provided far more information for anglers when compared with the level of fisheries reports in East Gippsland papers today.

The question arises as to whether fishing competitions should be held when the population of black bream is so low, and the answer is that if a competition is to be held it should be regulated similar to the Bream Classics namely a catch and release competition.

In a report prepared for the **2005 Black Bream Stock Assessment** meeting the following statement appears “Statistics from the last three Twin Rivers fishing Competitions indicated that the hours fished for each fish weighed in remained between 30 and 70 hours”

In a Report at **the 2004 Black Bream Stock Assessment** the following statement appears-

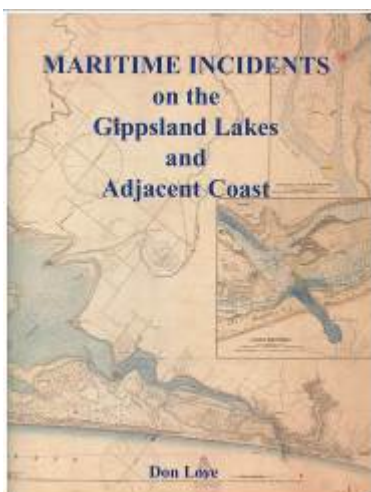
“The Knox Angling Club had 120 members who visited the Nicholson River in September 2004. 12 bream were caught on the Saturday and 3 on the Sunday. Based on six hours fishing per angler this would indicate a catch rate in excess of 80 hours per fish weighed in.”

This and similar statistics provide the basis for a comparison of the dramatic decline of the recreational black bream fishery between 1988 and 2004.

If we are to reach the “**Target One Million**” anglers, then it would be important to see a plan to stock the Gippsland Lakes, and encourage anglers to return to this wonderful estuary. Imagine if the Gippsland Lakes were stocked with mulloway, Australian bass and estuary perch, and the bream and dusky flathead populations were protected we might find that the Gippsland Lakes could provide a tremendous input into the current Government reaching its “Target One Million.” Project. Of course, we would need to resolve the problem of ten commercial fishermen netting this community resource in the Gippsland Lakes. What is often forgotten is that the fish population of the Gippsland Lakes is a community resource and is not the resource of ten commercial fishermen.

Source *Details of 1988 Recreational Fishing- South East Coast Tourism Fishing Reports* (Provided by Geoff Trusler)

Launch of New Book



“Maritime Incidents on the Gippsland Lakes and Adjacent Coast” by Don Love

In June, I had the pleasure of attending Collins Booksellers for the launch by Don Love of his book “Maritime Incidents on the Gippsland Lakes.” This 108 page book is the authors first book on this topic, and his research discovered so much material that a second book will follow. Don Love is the author of seven previous books on marine history including “Shipwrecks on the East Gippsland Coast.” The author suggests that the first men to set foot in the vicinity of the Gippsland Lakes “could have been the ill fated sailors from the wreck of the Sydney Cove who came ashore at the Northern end of the 90 mile beach in 1797.” The Sydney Cove was beached in the Furneaux Group of Islands carrying a cargo of 7000 gallons of rum Indian goods and some livestock. It was decided to send a lifeboat to Port Jackson to obtain help for the 50-lascar sailors. The lifeboat was wrecked on a beach thought to be close to Lakes Entrance. After a couple of days rest the lifeboat crew of

the First Mate 3 European sailors and twelve lascars set out for Port Jackson on foot. “For the next eight weeks they battled north slowly losing members of their party to starvation and clashes with less than friendly native tribes.” After eight weeks, three members of the lifeboat crew arrived in Port Jackson. This is the story of one boat but there are more than one hundred other stories of the boats that plied the lakes between 1797 and 1999. The book has early drawings and dozens of photographs of the boats and wreck sites. Any angler who fishes the lakes would enjoy knowing more of the ships and men who sailed the lakes. The book is available at most good bookshops and sells for \$19.



The Law and the Recreational Angler

Another Large Fine for Poachers

A Korumburra magistrate has told two abalone thieves they only dodged jail because of their guilty pleas before fining them a total of \$12,500. One man was from Foster, the other from Doncaster East and they were seen taking abalone from Chicken Rocks in Waratah Bay in December last year.

Plain clothes Fisheries Officers watched these poachers as they rode bikes to Chicken Rocks. When approached by Fisheries Officers they fled on their bikes and hid bags of abalone and wetsuits in the bush. After several hours hiding, the men returned to their car only to be apprehended by police before Fisheries Officers arrived and arrested them. The Foster man who had prior convictions for previous similar offences was fined \$8,000. All property was ordered to be forfeited and disposed of.

Editor

Congratulations to the Fisheries Officers for their arrest of these poachers.

Lakes Entrance Crab Poachers to Face Court

Fisheries Officers from Lakes Entrance have allegedly caught four people from Melbourne with ten times the daily limit of sand crabs. The two men and two women are expected to be charged on summons. The



apprehension of these poachers followed a concerned member of the public calling Fisheries.13 FISH (133 474). The recreational catch limit is 30 crabs per day per person. These four persons were found to have 1059 sand crabs.█

In another incident, a man and a woman are also expected to be charged on summons for exceeding the catch limit, fishing without a current licence, and using more than two hoop nets in marine waters. They were allegedly using 15 hoop nets and were in possession of 439 sand crabs. The Fisheries Officers seized the nets, crabs, and all associated equipment.

Editor

The Bairnsdale Advertiser featured the report from the Fisheries Media Release of July 6th on the front page, which is quite rare, and it is hoped this will make visitors to the area aware of the relevant fishing regulations. Source- Fisheries Victoria Media Release July 6th 2015

Trout Cod Fishery is a Possibility

Tim Curmi, President Native Fish Australia, provided me with an information letter, which should be of interest to recreational anglers. In this letter, Native Fish Australia indicates it is in favour of a bag limit of one fish per day for Trout cod with a slot size of 55-75cms, which is the same as the current Murray Cod, slot size. This fishery will operate in Lake Kerford and Lake Sambell near Beechworth. Members of Native Fish Australia would rather a “catch and release” fishery at this stage.

Native Fish Australia suggests there should be an intensive stocking of at least two other waters with Trout cod designated for recreational fisheries.

The Ovens River was heavily stocked with Trout cod between 1996 and 2006 and is now regarded as having a sustainable population of the species. It is suggested that the Goulbourn River near Trawool and possibly Lake William Hovell or Lake Buffalo should also be stocked



**Ovens River near Wangaratta.
and
Lake William Hovell above Whitfield**



Concern was expressed in this letter at the effect of redfin and golden perch in the Beechworth Lakes on Trout cod fingerlings. Small trout cod fingerlings have been found in the stomach of both species.

Whilst supporting a Trout cod fishery, the Native Fish Association believes the fishery is not yet ready for a “put and take fishery,” as the numbers of Trout cod in the Beechworth Lakes is still small, at the same time the letter suggests stocking rates for these lakes should be greater than the current 5000 per annum.█

In this letter is the suggestion from Native Fish Australia that there should be a seasonal angling closure between Wangaratta and Myrtleford on the Ovens River to protect the trout cod and this suggestion is accompanied by a detailed submission.

“The rationale behind this proposed closure is to promote the recovery of native fish populations in these waters, and to accelerate the introduction of angling for two threatened species.”(From the NFA Submission 2014)█



Trout Cod and Ovens River below Myrtleford where 40,000 Macquarie Perch were released

Editor

This was a most interesting letter, which provided a vision of the Trout cod fishery in the future. The seasonal closure of the section of the Ovens River would also provide protection to the 40,000 Macquarie perch stocked in this section of the river. I was interested at the suggestion from Native Fish Australia that Lake William Hovell might be stocked with Trout cod, remembering that the King River had a population of Trout cod and the taking of the last Trout cod from that river occurred in 1980. (See Issue 91) The King River, a delightful trout stream is dammed to form Lake William Hovell. This river joins the Ovens River in Wangaratta, which in turn joins the Murray River at Yarrawonga.

Over the last five years over 42,000 fingerling Trout cod have been released in Victorian waters. It is intended to establish viable populations of this species in the Goulbourn and Upper Murray and this is regarded as high priority. According to Environment Victoria there are currently three self sustaining populations of Trout cod in Victoria, namely in the Murray River downstream of Yarrawonga Weir, in the Ovens River and a small population in Seven Creeks.

Whilst some problems remain to be resolved, it is exciting to see the return of Trout cod to some of our streams, as well as Macquarie perch. Both Fisheries Victoria and Native Fish Australia are to be congratulated on this achievement.

Source- Native Fish Association of Australia and President Tim Curmi

Record Stocking of Golden Perch and Murray Cod in Victoria

This year has seen a record number of golden perch stocked on Victorian waters and in particular in Lake Eildon. Around 250,000 golden perch have been released this year, eclipsing the 233,000 released in 2009. This restocking of golden perch in Lake Eildon is important, as this species does not breed in Lake Eildon. In this last summer, over 2 million native fish have been released into 91 lakes and rivers and this has included 607,000 Murray cod. Most of these fish have been grown at the Snobs Creek hatchery. This is the third consecutive season that over 500,000 Murray cod have been produced at Snobs Creek. Snobs Creek has played a key role in stocking our streams and I recall as a teacher taking students from Mansfield High School for annual excursions to Snobs Creek and this is around sixty years ago. At that time, Snobs Creek was a trout hatchery, providing fingerlings for the trout streams of this state.

Readers might be interested that the Mitta Mitta River was one of the many lakes and rivers to receive a stocking of 20,000 Murray cod in the last summer. Other waters to receive a stocking of Murray cod

included Goulbourn R. (100,000), Campaspe R. (20,000), Broken R. (20,000), Loddon R. (35,000), and lakes Nillahcootie (20,000), Hume (90,000), Kangaroo (20,000), Tailors (20,000), Buffalo (26,690), and Eppalock (75,000).

Source- Media Release from The Hon. Jaala Pulford MLC Minister for Agriculture July 7th 2015

A Snobs Creek Special

Fisheries Victoria takes pleasure in introducing Bruno to anglers. Bruno is a brown trout that is one of the broodstock at Snobs creek Hatchery, where trout and salmon are grown for statewide stocking. Bruno is three years old and weighs about 4.5kgs. Other broodfish males weigh between 2.8 and 5kgs. Fish like Bruno are released into Eildon Pondage each year when their contribution to the breeding program is finished. The Eildon Pondage is open to fishing all year round and has family facilities. Stocking is funded by fishing licence fees and the State Governments Target One Million plan, which aims to get more Victorians fishing more often

One can only imagine the surprise of an angler fishing the pondage and hooking a fish like Bruno.

Source Fisheries Victoria website.



Don Cunningham's Bemm River Report



A wonderful spell of sunny weather, has favoured those who ventured out with children over the school holidays. Fishing has been patchy, with some of the better results occurring when there has been that much desired ripple on the water. Fishing on the drift using wigglers has produced some great bags for those who have persevered. Morning has been the best time with most afternoons very quiet. Sandworm and local prawn are the best baits, and with plenty of moves are giving fair results. Once it becomes flat calm, bites can be scarce, however you never know as some of the best sessions reported to me have been just before dark. You need to be rugged up with plenty of warm clothing, as at that time of day it is freezing.

We had low water in the lake last week, and the low tides have affected the surf until now. With 60mls of rain and strong winds over the last couple of days, the surf has been huge and that could sort out the beaches. The Bemm River is in flood, and the water level in the lake is very high. Good fishing to all Don Cunningham (14th July)

A Moments Relaxation



I was fortunate to see this photo of the Executive Director of Fisheries Victoria Travis Dowling in one of his moments of active relaxation diving off Point Nepean in around 15 metres of water and the resultant crayfish. When I inquired about this venture, I was informed by Travis that he spent most of his dive exploring caves and identifying fish in the area. He acknowledged the crayfish were largely a result of the efforts of his diving companion Craig Ingram, a former abalone diver and now Coordinator of the "Target One Million" program. Travis Dowling is an avid angler with his own Kayak, and his Queens Birthday weekend was spent on the Goulbourn River with his young family chasing Murray Crayfish, and it was a most successful venture. In talking to Travis, he did mention that on this weekend hundreds of Victorian anglers were fishing and camping as they fished for crayfish on the Goulbourn and other Murray Rivers.

As anglers, we are very lucky to have an Executive Director who has a wide fishing experience and an avid enthusiasm for the sport.

LETTERS LETTERS LETTERS

Cormorants on the Gippsland Lakes

I received the following letter from Nick Barton on the 16th July on the subject of Cormorants.

Dear Lynton

I believe that "Around the Jetties" has become quite an influential publication in pursuing the interests of recreational anglers in the Gippsland Lakes. As such, I believe that you should be pushing hard for greater research and monitoring of what could be the most important factor reducing recreational fishing catch in the Gippsland Lakes- predation by birds, and in particular cormorants.

Your reviews in Issues 84 and 91 of the work of Reside and Coutin on predation by the great cormorant in the Gippsland Lakes, overlooks some salient points

1. The estimated great cormorant population in 1998 (3740) was not abnormally high; it was less than half the figure of 7800 from 1992.

2. The more reliable estimated tonnage of fish taken by great cormorants in 1998 was likely to be closer to the upper estimate of 531 tonnes derived from pellet analysis than the 261 tonnes estimated from the regurgitated stomach contents of a handful of netted birds.

3. The tonnage figure alone ignores the fact, the vast majority of fish consumed were below legal size limit for fishermen, and hence represent vastly greater numbers of fish. Average size of bream taken by cormorants was 17.89cms. Reside and Coutin estimated that in 1998 great cormorants took 6.5 million fish including 3.3 million bream.

4. The little black cormorant and Little Pied Cormorant are widespread and abundant in the Gippsland lakes. It is probable that these birds are taking large numbers of juvenile fish.



Gippsland Coastal Board Information sheet #LI makes a plea for annual monitoring of cormorant numbers, using monthly roost counts and seasonal aerial surveys. Recreational anglers should be strongly supporting this. Although cormorants are currently protected, protection of other native species can be waived if they are proved to be having a severe detrimental effect on other industries. Around the Jetties would be an ideal medium to promote increased research into the effect these birds are having on the recreational fishing industry.

References

[Gippsland Coastal Board \(2003\) "Cormorants of the Gippsland Lakes." Information Sheet.](#)

[Reside J and Coutin P.C. "Preliminary estimates of the population, diet, and fish consumption of the Great Cormorant in the Gippsland Lakes."](#)

Editor

Thank you Nick, for a thought-provoking letter. I agree that a case has been established where protection of species has been waived where that particular species was having a detrimental effect on other industries, however this would need to have community support in the case of cormorants, and this would be difficult to achieve. John McNally in his 1958 study suggests that no statewide control of cormorants should be attempted, as the large scale destruction of cormorants and their rookeries would be costly and ineffective and this approach has been discredited overseas. He suggests the first step would be to develop data on numbers over a five-year period.

Reside and Coutin in their study suggest a program of annual population monitoring with monthly roost and seasonal aerial surveys, which in turn would establish the natural predation of fish by the great cormorant based on their numbers on the Gippsland Lakes. This would require Fisheries and Government to recognise the scale of the problem and provide the funding for a monitoring program. Unfortunately, since 1958, there have been two studies and both have recommended monitoring. Anglers are still waiting for a monitoring program over a number of years to establish the scale of the problem. Perhaps an angler Forum might be a

starting point where Fisheries and Government can see the level of angler concern at the estimated current cormorant predation of species such as black bream in the Gippsland Lakes. This is a starting point and should indicate the scale of the problem, and next would be having established the level of predation, what can be done to resolve the problem. I hope that bodies such as VRfish might support a monitoring program of great Cormorant numbers on the Gippsland Lakes.

Re This Problem Twenty Years Ago in the United States

“Based on a review of the best scientific evidence, it does not appear that a strategy of reducing cormorant populations to benefit sport fish populations is biologically warranted. However, we maintain an open mind on this subject, and are willing to evaluate tis problem as new information becomes available. The service will continue to issue depredation permits in aquaculture situations, and where cormorant depredations cannot be handled by any other means.”

. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Migratory Bird Management 1995

Items in Brief

Statewide Angler Forums.

This year the Statewide Angler Forums will be held in October November. These forums are valuable as they provide an opportunity for anglers to raise concerns with Fisheries and to make suggestions on their sport. Over recent years, the introduction of these forums has been well received by both anglers and Fisheries Victoria. When the dates for the forums are announced mark this date on your calendar.

Statewide Recreational Roundtable

The last recreational Fishing Roundtable was held on June 5th. As of this date, no summary of that event has been made available to anglers. Under the Terms of reference, the Chairman of the Roundtable is to provide a summary of these meetings to anglers and Fisheries Victoria provides clerical assistance to support the chairman. It is disappointing to see six weeks elapse with no report. This publication regards the reports from these meetings as providing a direct communication to anglers, and as such is important.

Willow Removal in Victoria

“VRfish has been working closely with the Goulbourn Broken and North East CMA’s to ensure willow removal is best practice and responsive to recreational fishing values.” This statement was part of a VRfish report in the latest monthly publication. VRfish has been concerned that best practice has not been widely followed and has called for a 12-month moratorium on willow removal. Goulbourn Broken CMA has confirmed that there will be no further willow removal in areas currently being researched as part of the Wild Trout Response Plan. It is felt this moratorium is necessary whilst the Wild Trout Response Plan is implemented.

Opposition to Geelong Star Fishing Continues to Grow.

VRfish has received reports that the Geelong Star has been fishing next to game fisheries areas for Southern Bluefin Tuna in the Port MacDonnell area. VRfish is working closely with regional communities to protect iconic recreational fishing areas. The Australian Recreational Fishing Foundation has been engaged in negotiations with the Small Pelagic Fishing Association to achieve an outcome protecting recreational fisheries around Australia. These negotiations have collapsed due to the industry failing to recognise the concerns of recreational fishers and acknowledge the key recreational areas such as Portland, Warnambool Pt Fairy, and Apollo Bay.



New Dredge Guaranteed for the Gippsland Lakes

In a media release of the 16th July the Minister for Ports, Luke Donnellon announced at Jemmys Point Lookout with Gippsland Ports Chair Geoff Hocking, and CEO Nick Murray an up date on the procurement process for a new dredge. It was stated that securing the new dredge would “ensure ocean access at Lakes Entrance is maintained for the regions commercial fishing and tourism industries, which contribute to the local economy, and for recreational boating and fishing enthusiasts.” A successful bidder is to be announced later this year.

Editor- In recent times the dredging of the entrance to the Gippsland Lakes has deepened the opening and increased the salinity of the lakes. This in turn has seen black bream move up the rivers to escape the salinity levels at spawning time. If the new dredging increases the opening further and salinity levels, rather than “contributing to recreational fishing “ we may see the iconic black bream placed under increased pressure to survive in the changing Gippsland Lakes. It has to be recognised that the Gippsland lakes are becoming more marine in nature and this is causing major changes in the lakes. A basic problem is decreasing fresh water inflows and increasing salt-water inflows, and the result is a decline in recreational fishing in the largest estuary in this state. I doubt the recreational fishing community has had any input into this decision that will affect estuarine fish species in the Gippsland Lakes.

The Value of Recreational Fishing to the Gippsland Region

Last year the Gippsland Lakes Ministerial Advisory Committee was undertaking a study on the Economic Value of Fishing and another study on the Value of Boating on the Gippsland Lakes. Nothing has been heard of these studies and the public is unaware of any details or even who is actually undertaking these studies. However, we are able to use the Victorian Recreational Fishing Study of 2009 to see that recreational fishing is estimated to have contributed **\$173 million to the Gippsland region and provided 1,100 jobs.** The value of recreational fishing to the state of Victoria in this study totalled \$2.3 billion per annum across the state. In 2009, I received information from Ben Scullin former CEO of the Boating Industry Association **that “85% of all recreational vessel registrations are primarily for the purpose of recreational fishing.”** These are just a couple of basic statistics showing the value of recreational fishing to the Gippsland region and across the state.

The Nicholson River Dam

In a letter to Darren Chester, MHR, from the Hon. Barnaby Joyce, he stated in relation to the Nicholson River dam that, “East Gippsland Water and East Gippsland catchment Management Authority is in the process of assessing alternative cost effective options for the removal of the dam.”

Mr Chester passed this letter on to me and following the receipt of the letter, I had a phone call from Rex Candy, Strategic Manager of the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority, indicating discussions were taking place regarding options for dam removal that would allow fish movement in this river. The basic problem is funding at this time.

Anglers will wait with interest to see the outcomes of this discussion. I can’t help thinking of the lost opportunity for this dam removal over the four years of Coalition Government, when both Federal and State Governments could have worked together with local members to restore this river to its former flow, and the impact this would have had on fish stocks.

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Good Health and Good fishing